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SIPDIS

State for EUR/NB and OES/OA  
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TAGS: SENV EFIS PGOV IWC IC

SUBJECT: ICELAND: OUTGOING MINISTER ALLOWS FOR LARGE FIN WHALE HUNT QUOTA

REF: Reykjavik 20

Classified By: Ambassador Carol van Voorst for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

**¶11. (U) Action request: paragraph 7.**

**¶12. (C) Summary:** On January 27, outgoing Fisheries and Agriculture Minister Einar K. Gudfinsson quietly issued an order potentially allowing a massive increase in Iceland's hunting of fin and minke whales. The order allowed commercial quotas of fin and minke whales to be issued according to recommendations of the Icelandic Marine Research Institute (MRI) for the next five years. Although no numbers were specified, a ministry official told us that based on last year's MRI advice, the quota would likely be 150 fins and 100 minkes. A new interim government should be in place by the weekend and there is media speculation that the new minister would withdraw the order before the first animal is killed. However, pro-whaling forces are claiming that whaling could provide 300 new jobs. With the current economic crisis, the anti-whaling NGO believes the jobs argument will carry weight and urged the Embassy to make a loud and vocal protest. Both the British and Swedish Ambassadors have expressed to us their interest in a joint response. We believe a strong message must be delivered to the new Prime Minister as soon as possible. End Summary.

**¶13. (SBU)** The resignation of the Cabinet on January 26 meant longtime whaling supporter and Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture Einar K. Gudfinsson had little time left in office (reftel). Gudfinsson quietly issued a regulation on January 27 that allowed for fin and minke whale hunting quotas for 2009 through 2013. No numbers were provided for the total allowable takes, but the numbers will be determined by the recommendation of the Marine Research Institute (MRI). Twenty percent of each year's quota can be carried over into the next year. Stefan Asmundsson, Director of International Affairs at the Ministry of Fisheries, told Emboff that no decision has been made, but based on last year's MRI advice, the quota would likely be 150 fins and 100 minkes for 2009.

**¶14. (SBU)** The authority to determine whaling quotas unilaterally was bestowed on the fisheries minister by the Cabinet in 2006. Gudfinsson has several possible motivations for issuing such a quota on his way out the door. His voting district is a traditional fishing and whaling area; his constituents will remember this bold move when elections occur this spring. His political party has been anti-accession to the European Union because of the loss of sovereignty and control over fishing resources; whaling is something Iceland would have to give up to join the EU and this quota turns the whaling question into an issue of sovereignty and self-determination.

Gudfinsson's decision also forces the interim government to take a stand on a sensitive international and domestic issue immediately. Although the two parties in the minority coalition are typically anti-whaling, they will require the parliamentary support of one of the traditionally pro-whaling parties. Finally, the anti-whaling NGO Iceland Nature Conservancy Association (INCA) theorized to us that the quota was Gudfinnsson's parting shot at the International Whaling Commission for excluding Iceland in the recent discussions with Japan on small coastal whaling.

¶ 15. (SBU) While the tourism industry and the whale watching society have denounced the decision, the sole fin whale captain and the Minke Whaling Society immediately praised the decision and claimed it would provide up to 300 jobs. INCA believes that with the sudden rise in unemployment (from less than 2 percent to 7.6 percent in just a few months) the possible job creation aspect could make it harder to argue that whaling will hurt Iceland's interests. However, since the Icelandic domestic market uses only minke whale meat, the fin whale meat would have to be exported to Japan or an entirely new market. The ministry's announcement on the regulation says "uncertainty (over the marketability of fin whale products) has been abolished." After two years of effort and rumors that the fin whale captain was funding the export out of his own pocket, the Icelanders were able to export to Japan some fin whale meat from the seven whales caught in 2006. However, whether the market can profitably absorb the tons of meat the hunt will generate remains to be seen.

¶ 16. (C) INCA Director Arni Finsson told Econoff that urgent international action was needed. Finsson was concerned that with the sudden rise in unemployment, the 300 temporary jobs created will entice the public to accept the decision. Ambassador contacted her colleagues and heard from her British and Swedish counterparts that

they agree to deliver a joint letter and demarche to the new interim Prime Minister as early as possible.

¶ 17. (C) Comment and Action Request: We need to deliver a swift and forceful message to the interim government that whaling outside of the International Whaling Commission guidelines is unacceptable and the scale suggested, especially of endangered species, is unwarranted. Our central argument should be that at a time when Iceland is struggling to repair its tattered image and international credibility, a massive expansion of whaling activity is hardly a helpful move. Post would like instructions from Washington to see incoming Prime Minister soonest, with the text of a joint letter from the anti-whaling community.

van Voorst